

ON ACCOUNT OF THE MISHKAN

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

These (eileh) are the accountings of the Mishkan ... (Shemos 38:21)

Very often, simple words in the Chumash have a much deeper meaning than normal. This is often the case with the word "eileh," which translates as "these," but, whose gematria is equal to thirty-six, and whose letters can also spell the words "ohel" (aleph-heh-lamed) and "Leah" (lamed-aleph-heh), each being a Kabbalistic term. Hence, the above posuk, on a sod-level, can be read: THIRTY-SIX is the account of the Mishkan, and on this level, the very purpose and rectification of the Mishkan is revealed.

Thirty-six WHAT?

The names of G-d are, more accurately, terms that define His interaction with creation; different terms define different levels on which G-d operates within daily life.

For example, as much as we are used to reading the name, "Elokim" (Aleph-lamed-heh-yud-mem) horizontally like any other word, it is really to be viewed vertically, with the aleph on the bottom and the mem on top. Hence, conceptually, the name Elokim spans two levels of spiritual consciousness (Beriyah and Yetzirah) -- after which is our physical world, Asiyah -- indicating the direction of the flow of G-d's light from the Upper World to the Lower World.

The suffix of Elokim is the letters, yud-mem, which have the numerical value, FIFTY, as in, the "Fifty Gates of Understanding," to which the Talmud refers here:

Fifty Gates of Understanding were made in creation ... (Rosh Hashanah 21b)

In Hebrew, "understanding" is "Binah," and hence, the suffix of Elokim represents the eighth sefirah, Binah, through which the light of godly understanding passes before making its way to the lower worlds, albeit somewhat "filtered."

Below "Binah" are the six sefiros: Chesed, Gevuros, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod and Yesod, each of which is the Cosmic DNA of one corresponding millennium, and therefore, which govern our physical history. They, in turn, have six sefiros of their own while existing in an incomplete state, a state of existence which we call "exile," which makes a total of THIRTY-SIX sefiros.

It is to this that the "eileh" of this week's parshah refers.

For, as we know from the end of Parashas Beshallach (see Rashi), the goal and result of Amalek is to psychologically SPLIT the Name of G-d in the minds of the Jewish people. Practically-speaking, this means to effect the perspective of the Jew in such a way as to de-sensitize him to Divine Providence, weakening the bond between G-d and Jew. He'll let you do rituals galore, just as long as you are not real with G-d's Presence around you.

This is tantamount to driving an intellectual wedge between the yud-mem and the aleph-lamed-heh of Elokim, stymieing the flow of Divine light and clear understanding on the level of Binah, greatly reducing its influence on the lower six sefiros. Our mission, when learning Torah and doing mitzvos, of course, is to reverse this evil and destructive trend, and unify the "eileh" with the "yum."

Such a state of unification is called "redemption," and it is what the Mishkan accomplished. The descending of the Divine Presence into the Mishkan and "occupying" of it (to some degree), was symbolic of the Divine light that was once again flowing from "Binah" to the Lower World -- the essence of a miracle, and what we can look forward to in the days of Moshiach.

Shabbos Day:

These are the accountings of the Mishkan -- the Mishkan of Testimony ... (Shemos 38:21)

The double usage of the word "Mishkan" tips us off that there is a "drosh" within this posuk; indeed, Rashi tells us the same thing:

"[The word "Mishkan" is mentioned] twice to hint to the Mikdosh that was taken as a surety in the two destructions for the sins of the Jewish people." (Rashi)

However, as we can see from Rashi, it is not just the second mentioning of Mishkan that points us in the direction of the meaning of the deeper meaning. Rather, the word "Mishkan" itself, with a slight vowel change, can be transformed into the word, "mashkon," which means "surety."

It is a play on words, to be sure. However, it is also an example of one of the beauties of the Jewish language, whose vowels, unlike most other languages, are represented by lines and dots, and not by the letters they represent. As a result, one word can have two meanings -- indeed, two OPPOSITE meanings -- when the vowels are changed accordingly.

Hence, the letters: mem-shin-chof-nun, can either spell the Hebrew word for "dwelling" -- Mishkan - or, "surety" -- mashkon And, once this has been established, we can begin to seek out the mussar (positive criticism) involved in such a double entendre, as is the case in so many examples of the same idea.

Having finished the construction of the Mishkan, and now being in a position to step back and take the extent of our accomplishment into our intellectual field of vision, we are assisted by Heaven to understand what it is that TRULY stands before us. We built a Mishkan! A dwelling place for the Divine Presence! A phenomenal human accomplishment hitherto thought impossible! Look, see for yourself ... It is right before your eyes!

Yes, absolutely correct. However, in building a Mishkan, Heaven adds, you have also built a mashkon, and before we go on with history, you must understand well the choice each creates. For the choice shall be YOURS whether what you have created acts as a Mishkan or a mashkon.

What is the inherent difference?

The entire point of the Mishkan was to act as a way to reveal the glory of G-d within creation. The Mishkan was a microcosm of the universe, almost an "experiment" to show us the way to turn the entire world into a Mishkan. For, just as we successfully turned raw, physical materials into a holy synergization of abilities and intentions to draw the Presence of the Divine into creation, so, too, can we do this with the entire universe, if aspire to raise ourselves and the world to the sublime level of "Holy to G-d."

It was no different with the Temple, either. The windows of the Temples, as it has been pointed out, were narrow on the inside and wider on the outside to signify the importance of spreading G-d's light to the entire world. It was as if the light in the Temple flowed out and sanctified the rest the world as it moved out in all directions from the center of the universe.

However, all of that was, is, dependent upon the loyalty of the Jewish people to G-d and His holy Torah. It only worked when WE worked -- hard at being a "light unto nations," by fulfilling the mitzvos with energy and love. Nothing expresses one's belief in G-d and Torah than when he or she does the mitzvos with zest. Longing for leniencies looks like a prisoner waiting for his or her chance to escape.

But, even then, the purpose of the Mishkan doesn't change. G-d made This World that we live in to reveal His Presence, one way ... or another. The "one way" is the Mishkan; the "another" is the mashkon, that is, the destruction of the Temple and exile of the Jewish people -- negative fulfillments of negative prophecies.

The Mishkan/Mashkon is no longer with us physically, nor the Temples in Jerusalem; they were taken a long time ago. However, they are with us conceptually, and we are constantly being asked the same question: Mishkan, or Mashkon?

The imprisoned Jews of Iran -- Mishkan, or mashkon? The two little girls, severed from their mother and their beloved Judaism by an Italian (Eisav-based) court of law -- Mishkan, or, mashkon? Simply modern-day politics, or, a challenge from Heaven to start getting our Torah-act together?

Writing letters to dignitaries may be appropriate and important, but the real avodah, the real work of

the Jewish people today is to transform present-day "sureties" back into the basis for the Divine Presence to once again dwell among us. Therefore, if we're going to start pointing fingers anywhere, it might as well be back at ourselves. If we're going to start searching for REAL solutions, we might as well realize they begin with us, and not with Italian dignitaries, as they have told us in their own "polite" way.

As Hashkofah makes clear, devoid of a belief in the one, true G-d, and lacking in respect for Torah and mitzvos, such people can only be, at best, "puppets" acting out a Divine response to lackings WITHIN the Jewish people. Fix the problems from within, and you fix the problems from without; you transform mashkon back into Mishkan once again.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

And they brought the Mishkan to Moshe ... (Shemos 39:33)

"Because, they themselves were unable to erect it ..." (Rashi)

One could be finical and question the accuracy of the above verse. They did NOT bring the Mishkan to Moshe, for, as Rashi points out, the Mishkan still remained unassembled at that point. What they brought, then, was the parts of the Mishkan to Moshe, for HIM to assemble in their stead.

The posuk, of course, is perfectly accurate -- it is the words of the Living G-d. And, so are we accurate in asking, for, it is from this that drosh emerges, and teaches us another important point of Torah hashkofah. In this case, what G-d thinks of our accomplishments, in spite of what we may think of them.

We don't have to be told that being overly proud of our successes, or, taking pride in accomplishments that are not really ours doesn't go over well in Heaven. G-d elevates the lowly and reduces the proud, and besides that, who is it REALLY that allows us to do anything in the first place?

However, very often people set out to accomplish a certain spiritual task, and even from the outset, they know they are up against a high wall. Like trying to open the minds and hearts of millions of Jews to their three-thousand year old heritage, to inspire them to accept upon themselves the responsibility of Torah -- an awesome task.

And, when one considers how much time, effort, and money goes into "making" even a single, healthy, independent "Ba'al Teshuvah" -- someone who can approach a Torah-lifestyle in the Western World with spiritual and intellectual maturity -- against how many Jews there are to effect, and one could say, "Why even try?" The answer is, the posuk quoted above.

How is that? Because, it is not our job to put together Mishkans, no matter what form they take; we

barely even make the parts. However, it IS the job of G-d to put together the Mishkans of history (albeit through his leaders), and since He plans to do it, and knows that we would do it if we could too, He looks at the "pieces" we provide as if they are already assembled -- as if they have already been unified in a Mishkan.

This is the meaning of the Midrash that says it is our job to make a small opening, that G-d will drive a wagon through. We have to care about the "pieces," and put all of our love and concern into their development. Then, when the moment is right, G-d will take those pieces, and build a Mishkan of which we never dreamed of being a part -- and give us all the credit for the final product.

A good deal, no?

MELAVE MALKAH:

As for the Heavens -- the Heavens are G-d's, but the earth was given to man ... (Tehillim 115:16)

This is not the next Shir Shel Yom that I should have discussed here (Monday's was next). In fact, we should have discussed this tehillah later, b"H, when we get to Hallel. However, since the Talmud uses the above verse to understand this week's parshah, it seemed appropriate to look at it now.

Says the posuk in this week's parshah: ... Moshe completed the work. Then a cloud covered the Appointed Tent and the Glory of G-d filled the dwelling. (Shemos 40:33-34)

Rebi Yosi said: The Divine Presence never [actually] came down, and Moshe and Eliyahu never [actually] ascended to Heaven, as it says, "As for the Heavens -- the Heavens are G-d's, but the earth was given to man ..." (Tehillim 115:16). The Divine Presence never came down? It is written, "G-d came down on Mt. Sinai ..." (Shemos 19:20). [That means only] until ten tefachim [above the ground] ... (Succah 5a)

So close, and yet so far away. But then again, close enough to experience the Divine in as much glory as a physical human being can handle. Nevertheless, this serves to remind us that closeness with G-d has its limitations in this physical world of ours, and it is not a coincidence that the separation was TEN tefachim.

For, the number "ten" always alludes, ultimately, to the ten sefiros that "transport" the light from the Ain Sof on the top of the spiritual "totem pole" down to all the ten sefiros below it, at whose bottom we reside.

Hence, when the Jewish people saw the cloud that symbolized the Divine Presence come down over the Tent of Meeting, they witnessed, in fact, a paradox. What they saw was two spiritual realities overlapping one another -- the highest and the lowest -- a bending of the rules of creation just for the sake of the Jewish people.

But then again, so were the Ten Plagues, and the Ten Commandments. This is why the Mishnah can make the following statement with confidence:

The Tablets were the work of G-d, and the writing was the writing of G-d engraved upon the Tablets. Don't read "charus" (engraved) but "cheirus" (freedom), because there is no free person except one who is busy with Torah. (Pirkei Avos 6:2)

Just a nice idea? No! Torah, like the Ten Commandments and the Ten Plagues represents an interface between two very different realities, and, when one learns Torah with this understanding, he can cross over a spiritual threshold and to a degree suitable to him, rise above the limitations of everyday physical life. Such an idea is a fitting end to Sefer Shemos.

May we all merit such a reality. CHAZAK!

Good Shabbos,
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